



## Transportation Synthesis Report

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### Best Practices for Public Involvement In Transportation Projects

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*Transportation Synthesis Reports (TSRs) are brief summaries of currently available information on topics of interest to WisDOT technical staff in highway development, construction and operations. Online and print sources include NCHRP and other TRB programs, AASHTO, the research and practices of other state DOTs, and related academic and industry research.*

#### **REQUEST FOR REPORT**

As Wisconsin citizens become better informed and more technologically savvy, WisDOT is working to develop improved processes for involving the public in transportation planning and design. The RD&T program was asked to review public involvement practices in other state transportation agencies, identify tools used in public involvement campaigns, and locate guidelines, suggestions and tips for effective public involvement campaigns.

#### **SUMMARY**

While there is currently not a comprehensive synthesis of national practices for public involvement in transportation projects, numerous examples are available of state practices, technological tools, and national and state guidelines. Most campaigns to involve the public entail a variety of approaches and tools, from simple press releases, door-to-door solicitations, and public meetings, to sophisticated visualization presentations, public comment database software, and interactive state Web sites.

A review of the practices outlined below offers a clear sense that Web sites and visualization software have become critical to successful, sophisticated public information campaigns. Furthermore, processes must be fluid enough to adapt to demographics and geography of sites, accessible to publics of all income profiles and urban or rural locations.

In this report we review practices of several **states** recognized for effective public involvement campaigns, look at articles and Web sites devoted to various traditional and high technology **tools**, and identify **guidelines** and tips found on transportation sites and in journal articles.

#### **STATES**

States typically engage public involvement campaigns from early in the transportation project planning process, employing methods ranging from door-to-door canvassing to project Web sites. Frequent updates, via press or Internet, seem common, and providing the public a sense for how its comments and concerns are used or considered proves a critical element in successful public involvement practices.

**Colorado.** A potent public involvement campaign eased dissatisfaction with the rehabilitation schedule for a major roadway in Denver, allowing full closure of sections of the road and reducing almost a year of construction time and 20 percent in costs off the project. <http://www.transportation.org/aashto/success.nsf/allpages/06-ColoradoPR>.  
Tactics included:

- Meetings and door-to-door visits to area businesses.
- Colored maps detailing project and schedule.
- Quarterly newsletters to residents and businesses, including free advertising for businesses.
- Web postings, news releases, meetings with media.
- Rapid response to noise, detour, and signage complaints.

**Michigan.** “Spending Resources to Maximize Participation: Using an Innovative Media Campaign as a Substitute for an Initial Public Meeting,” J. Meyers, et al, *Seventh TRB Conference on the Application of Transportation Planning Methods*, March 1999, 148-154. Through billboards, radio advertisements at peak times, media conferences and public relations campaigns, and Web site postings, Kent County created high community and media interest in lieu of an initial public meeting on a major investment study. Hard copy attached.

**Ohio.** “Public Participation and Bridge Type Selection,” J. Meyer, J.M. Barker and K. Ishmael, *Transportation Research Record 1770*, 2001; 173-180. Working with elected officials and metropolitan planning organizations, ODOT was able in 1999 to marshal regional public approval for a Toledo bridge, the largest and most expensive project the state had undertaken to that point, within five months. Available in the WisDOT Library. See also “Effective Use of Public Involvement to Achieve aesthetic Quality in Bridge Design,” M.D. Sherman; 181-187. Available in the WisDOT library.

**Texas.** “Public Involvement Plan for the Kelly Parkway Corridor Study,” R.J. Rivera and R.W. Jackson, *Eighth TRB Conference on the Application of Transportation Planning Methods*, April 2001, 132-137. For a 9-mile highway project in San Antonio, TxDOT used a Web site and a variety of community-sensitive public relations methods to reach a largely Spanish-speaking-only population. Hard copy attached.

**Virginia.** “An Assessment of the Virginia Department of Transportation’s Public Involvement Practices and the Development of a Public Involvement Toolkit: Phase II,” A.A. O’Leary, et al, June, 2003. A detailed look at VDOT practices, it includes analysis of dozens of tools for small- and large-scale public involvement campaigns, efforts like public meetings, public opinion surveys, transportation fairs, and brainstorming sessions, providing information on when to use, pros and cons, and tips for effective use.  
[http://www.virginiadot.org/vtrc/main/online\\_reports/pdf/03-r17.pdf](http://www.virginiadot.org/vtrc/main/online_reports/pdf/03-r17.pdf).

## **TOOLS**

Still coalescing, a canon of techniques and tools has yet to be finalized, as various agencies – state, federal and international – continue to experiment with methods and computer-based tools.

**Transportation Research Record 1817.** This issue, called “Transportation Planning and Analysis 2002,” features three articles on technological tools in public involvement. Available in the WisDOT library.

- “Integrating Visualization into Structured Public Involvement: Case Study of Highway Improvement in Central Kentucky,” K. Bailey, J. Brumm, and T. Grossardt; 50-57. Considers three visualization modes; finds three-dimensional images more effective than two-dimensional; recommends electronic scoring for expression of views and rapid assessment; identifies factors that inform the efficacy of visualization in public involvement.
- “Internet Outreach in Statewide Long-Range Planning: New Jersey Experience,” P. Lebeaux; 120-129. Discusses NJDOT’s long-term planning Web site -- <http://www.njchoices.com/> -- and its public input emphasis, complete with maps, games, tutorials, surveys, and more.
- “Enhancing Public Involvement Through Full Utilization of Communications Technology,” S. Russell and J.K. Herzer; 177-182. Explores use of Web sites, e-mail, online input; includes case studies.

**Virtual Reality in Transportation Research Record 1770.** Called “Design of Structures 2001,” this issue includes a report on the feasibility in the U.K. of virtual reality technology in public involvement and design. See “Virtual Reality Images to Aid Public Involvement in Appearance of Roads and Bridges,” J. Wallsgrove and R. Barlow; 166-172. The U.K. Highway Agency employs virtual reality to ensure beautiful bridge designs, an effort for which artist’s renderings and physical models proved insufficient. Available in the WisDOT library.

**Public Comment Database Software.** AASHTO recommends this software via hot buttons on its Web site. Called “CommentWorks,” this Web-based software from ICF Consulting allows the gathering and categorization of comments, preparation of summaries and responses, tracking and reporting. See ICF’s sleek description at [http://www.icfconsulting.com/Services/Information\\_Technology/CommentWorks/Overview.asp](http://www.icfconsulting.com/Services/Information_Technology/CommentWorks/Overview.asp).

**Visualization Software.** While it is not clear what software every agency uses, the following offer promise for creating engaging images for presentations or Web sites.

- HighRoad, by Creative Engineering, Australia, allows designers with minimal technical expertise to create 3-D animation visualizations of designs’ see <http://www.createng.com.au/>.
- A graphic artist at North Carolina DOT creates 2-D and 3-D photo simulations using Adobe PhotoShop. See <http://www.doh.dot.state.nc.us/preconstruct/highway/roadway/Visualization/>. Adobe Illustrator and other software often are mentioned by transportation project illustrators; see the Adobe site at <http://www.adobe.com/products/main.html>.

## **GUIDELINES**

Clearly, states and national transportation organizations look to FHWA for direction on public involvement campaigning, though the Administration’s official guidelines seem a little outdated. Nevertheless, FHWA seems involved in most of the cutting edge developments in this sub-specialty of planning and development agencies.

**Transportation and Community and System Preservation Pilot Program (TCSP).** This FHWA program focuses on public involvement: see <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/tcsp/case8.htm>. The page includes guidelines and case studies, including:

- Teton County, Wyo., used a series of public workshops to consider land use, Forest Service road work, and highway work for mixed-use corridor planning.
- Anchorage, Alaska, evaluated its public input processes, and emerged with tools and techniques.
- Lansing, Mich. developed long-term plans via public forums, visual preference surveys, briefings, and public opinion surveys.
- Tips include making meetings accessible and engaging; using strong visual presentations with three-dimensional art; crafting synergistic strategies; valuing public input.

**FHWA.** The Administration offers a variety of guidelines for public involvement processes. According to the Virginia Transportation Research Council, FHWA will release later this year a new interactive public involvement tool, though we were unable to confirm this. For now, see:

- “Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-making,” 1996; <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/cover.htm>.
- “How to Design a Public Involvement Program,” drawn from the 1996 manual, above; [http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/pi\\_p\\_d.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/pi_p_d.htm).
- Frequently Asked Questions, [http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/pub\\_inv/q\\_and\\_a.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/pub_inv/q_and_a.htm).

**TR News.** “Going Public: Involving Communities in Transportation Decisions,” May/June 2002. This issue devoted to public involvement in transportation addresses technological tools, best practices, and suggestions for setting up public involvement programs. <http://gulliver.trb.org/publications/trnews/trnews220.pdf>. Highlights include:

- Primer and best practices, 4-8.
- Visualization and other technological tools, with references and Web sites, 9-17.
- Case studies in Ohio, Kansas, Arizona and Utah, 20-24.
- Involving low-income communities, guides and case studies, 25-34.
- Self-evaluation and response, 35-38.

**NCHRP.** NCHRP Report 480, “A Guide to Best Practices for Achieving Context Sensitive Solutions” (2002) explores public involvement in section D, “Reflecting Community Values,” 23-34:

[http://gulliver.trb.org/publications/nchrp/nchrp\\_rpt\\_480d.pdf](http://gulliver.trb.org/publications/nchrp/nchrp_rpt_480d.pdf). Topics include:

- Identifying stakeholders and tailoring campaign to likely support and objections.
- Tailoring tools and techniques to stakeholders, geographic considerations, and public outreach program histories.
- Identifying relevant community issues and constraints.
- Identifying alternatives with stakeholders.

**TRB Subcommittee on Planning and Public Involvement, A1D04.** The committee's Web site offers links, contacts, and a few articles and white papers from years past: <http://trb-pi.hshassoc.com/publicationsandarticles.htm>.

**Conference paper.** "Public Involvement: 'Do You Have a "Policy" or a "Plan"?" J. Reed and M. Bosley, *Eighth TRB Conference on the Application of Transportation Methods*, April 2001, 128-131. These authors consider self-assessment, goal setting, benchmarking and best practices in creating plans out of policies. Hard copy attached.